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FOR AMBASSADOR NULAND FROM AMBASSADOR ARNALL

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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/NATO: SCENESETTER FOR AMBASSADOR  
NULAND

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROLAND ARNALL FOR REASONS 1.4(B,D).  
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Ambassador Nuland:

1, (C) My staff and I warmly welcome you to The Hague. Our Dutch hosts, including Foreign Minister Bot, are looking forward to consulting on a wide range of NATO-related issues with you, and you will also have excellent opportunities to engage with Parliamentarians and the press during your visit. The fact that you will be coming to The Hague directly from Afghanistan -- and Uruzgan in particular -- makes your visit especially timely.

ELECTION POLITICS:  
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12. (C) This is an election year, with all that that entails. The governing center-right coalition of Christian Democrats (CDA) and Liberals (VVD) face tough opposition from the center-left Labor Party (PvdA), but the results are far from certain. At the moment, the PvdA -- led by the charismatic Wouter Bos -- have a 5-10 point lead in the polls over the next largest party (CDA), but a strong economy appears to be shifting support back to Prime Minister Balkenende and his political allies, the VVD. No single party has enough support to win a majority, which ensures that the next government -- like all Dutch governments -- will be a coalition. If CDA and VVD together win a majority, they could exclude PvdA from the next government, even if PvdA emerges as the largest party in Parliament. Alternatively, PvdA may seek to form a coalition with either the CDA or VVD -- in either case, moderating the PvdA's more Euro-centric approach to foreign policy. There is a remote chance that left-leaning parties -- PvdA, the Socialist Party (S/P), and GreenLeft (GL) -- could form a majority in Parliament, but long-standing differences between the parties would make the formation of a stable government extremely unlikely. If no natural majority emerges from the November 22 elections a few small parties -- such as the Protestant Christian Union (CU) -- could become kingmakers. You will have a chance to meet representatives of all the key parties at lunch.

13. (C) The good news is that nearly every possible government coalition will be positively inclined toward NATO and supportive, to one degree or another, of continued Dutch involvement in future NATO missions. This reflects the deep transatlantic orientation pervading Dutch political culture. Only a few weeks ago, the formerly Maoist Socialist Party (SP) formally renounced its

decades-long opposition to Dutch NATO membership in a blatant effort to present itself as a "credible" coalition partner for the PvdA. The PvdA, meanwhile, has been careful to draw a distinction between its opposition to many U.S. policies from its long-standing support for NATO; the PvdA, for example, opposed the deployment of 600 Dutch Special Forces to Afghanistan under OEF, but unanimously supported the deployment of 1,400 troops to Uruzgan as part of the ISAF mission.

AFGHANISTAN:  
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¶4. (C) Afghanistan remains the elephant in the room in this election. Having supported the Uruzgan mission, albeit with reservations, the PvdA leadership has no desire to reopen the deployment decision as a campaign issue. That said, public support for the mission remains weak -- a recent poll indicates that 57 percent of the population is opposed to the mission -- and all parties remain sensitive to the potential impact of events on the ground on the electorate. So far, the Dutch have been lucky not to have lost any personnel as the direct result of combat, but a dramatic increase in Dutch casualties, a scandal involving detainees, or clear indications that "reconstruction" projects in Uruzgan will not be possible during the Dutch deployment could all increase public dissatisfaction with the mission while pushing the three largest parties into contrary positions. At the same time, smaller parties such as the Progressive Liberals (D-66), Green Left, and the Socialists, will continue to exploit public concerns about the mission to steal votes from the larger parties.

¶5. (C) In this tense environment, even relatively minor or technical questions -- such as the appropriate level of support Dutch troops should provide to ISAF forces in neighboring provinces -- will be exposed to intense media and parliamentary scrutiny. So far, the Government has stood firm to every challenge, but your GONL counterparts will appreciate any reassurances to help stiffen its resolve to stay the course.

ROAD TO RIGA:  
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¶6. (C) Regardless of the outcome of the November 22 elections, Prime Minister Balkenende will come to Riga in a caretaker capacity -- forming a new Dutch government generally takes between three and six months -- and with his mind firmly focused on domestic politics. Fortunately, the issues currently on the table for Riga are not likely to be contentious domestically or create divisions between us and the Dutch. In recent weeks, the Dutch have dropped their opposition to granting Intensified Dialogue to Georgia and signed a Letter of Intent committing 500 hours worth of funding to the C-17 project for FY07. On other issues -- NRF, Global Partnership, NTM-I, etc. -- the Dutch generally support our objectives and share our frustration over the unwillingness of other partners to move forward quickly or to deploy resources. Over the long term, the Dutch are cautious about enlargement/expansion prospects and hope to engage in a "comprehensive" dialogue on the NATO's identity and future roles before extending new invitations -- a position determined as much by domestic skepticism about the EU's rapid expansion as by any NATO-specific concerns. No doubt your interlocutors will look to you for clues regarding our long-term thinking about NATO to help formulate their positions for Riga and beyond.

ARNALL